

CANNING'S MEMORANDUM, DECEMBER 19, 1832

F.O. 78/211. *Memo.*, on the Turco-Egyptian Question, by Sir Stratford Canning: **encl'd** in: Canning, Paris, Dec. 19/32; to Palmerston.

The Turkish Empire has reached, in its decline, that critical point, at which it must either revive and commence a fresh era of Prosperity, or fall into a state of complete dissolution. To Great Britain the fate of this Empire can never be indifferent. It would affect the interests of her Trade and East Indian Possessions, even if it were unconnected with the maintenance of her relative Power in Europe. Nearer and more pressing Duties may forbid His Majesty's Government to take an active part in the Contest which now agitates Turkey; but the issue of a struggle so likely to prove decisive of the Sultan's independence, can hardly be overlooked and left to chance on any sound Principles of English Policy.

Often as the Sultan and his Predecessors have had occasion to maintain their Authority by force of Arms, they have always done so with ultimate Success, except in the recent instance of the Greeks. But the Egyptian War, though originating in the same vicious system of government, which has caused so many Convulsions in Turkey, is far more dangerous to the Porte than any preceding Rebellion, whether it be considered with reference to the Character and Resources of Mehemet Ali, or to the difficulties of the Sultan's Position. The Pasha, however, if he succeed in the end, will not be able to carry his point without a severe and protracted Contest. Already overstrained by his exertions, he can only sustain them by imposing Additional Burthens on Egypt and Syria, increasing thereby the hazard and odium inseparable from the prosecution of his enterprise. His Sovereign, who has publicly branded him as a Rebel and Outlaw, is urged by the strongest motives to reject such terms of compromise as, on any probable supposition, it would agree with the views or safety of the Pasha to offer of his own accord. If Mehemet Ali be superior in point of capacity, if he can dispose more completely of the resources of his Country, and exhibit a higher degree of discipline in his Fleet and Army, the Sultan, on the other hand, has those advantages, which belong to an acknowledged Right, and a greater extent of Territory. He cannot be blind to the consequences of allow-

ing his Vassal to form a separate Sovereignty within the Limits of his Empire. The Erection of Syria and Egypt into an independent State would in fact cut off the communication between Constantinople and Mecca, and while it weakened Mahmoud's Title to the Caliphate, would place the most important Parts of Arabia and Mesopotamia under the controul of his Enemy.

The extraordinary Progress made by Ibrahim Pasha during the last Campaign has given rise to an idea, that the Capital itself is not beyond his reach. In Turkey no kind or description of Revolution is impossible. But the Egyptian Army has paused in its Career. The Sultan has had time to repair, in some measure, his losses; and the Grand Visir at the head of a considerable Force, composed in part of new Levies, and partly of the Albanian Troops, which he commanded with so much credit in Bosnia, will afford a rallying point for the remains of the Army defeated under Hussein Pasha, and, if not strong enough to attack the Egyptian cantonments, will at least be able to make a stand in the fastnesses of Mount Taurus. But let us suppose an extreme case. The Vizir, no doubt, may experience the fate of his Predecessor; his Army may be dispersed; the country may rise in favour of the Egyptians; and Ibrahim Pasha, encouraged by these circumstances, may possibly follow up his Victory even to the Shores of the Bosphorus, and dictate the most humiliating Terms to the Sultan.

In this case one of two results would be unavoidable. The Sultan must either abandon his Throne altogether, or consent to such a reduction of his Empire as would leave Mehemet Ali in permanent Possession of Egypt and Syria with all the Country behind those Provinces as far as the Persian Frontier. Supposing the triumphant Viceroy to occupy and maintain himself on the vacant Throne of Constantinople, it is evident that he would be placed towards the Powers of Europe in the same position as the Sultan, with the additional weakness belonging to an usurped Title, and the necessity of flattering the religious prejudices of the Turks. The Interests of England and of Christendom would gain little by such a change. Whatever price the Chief of a new Dynasty would be willing to pay for recognition, could equally be obtained from the reigning Sultan in return for support and coöperation. Supposing the contest to terminate in the formation of a separate Government under the Sceptre of Mehemet Ali or of Ibrahim Pasha, the Sultan, deprived of so large a Portion of his Empire, and degraded in the opinion of his Subjects, would find it more difficult than ever either to make head against the encroachments of Russia, or to carry on that system of

improvement, which is become essential to the maintenance of his Independence.

If the contending Parties were left to themselves it is but too probable that a long and arduous War would drain their respective resources, and, by adding another cause of desolation to those which have long worn down the Turkish Empire, render it an easy prey to the first Invader. Nor is it in this respect alone that a protracted Contest in the Mediterranean Provinces of Turkey would be detrimental to European Interests. The necessities of both Parties would oblige them to employ every kind of extortion and violence injurious to life and property, and it is difficult to conceive how Commerce more than civilization could expand, or even exist, under such a pressure.¹

So many indeed and great are the Evils which this Contest is likely to generate in its Progress,² that it becomes a duty to enquire by what means Great Britain, either alone or in concert with any of her Allies, may best contribute to hasten its Termination. No pretext for interference is wanting. The Sultan and the Pasha have both appealed to the friendly and equitable disposition of the British Cabinet, but with this difference, that the former applies for our assistance, and the latter for our mediation. It is not surprising that the Sultan, whose Honour and Independence are at stake, should look for succour to that Power, which has once already been the instrument of restoring Egypt to the Porte; nor is it less natural, that Mehemet Ali should reckon, however erroneously, upon Great Britain for the means of securing to him that independence, of which the Greek Insurrection has probably given him the idea and the occasion.

Unfortunately this very consideration indisposes the Sultan to every kind of foreign interference unaccompanied with a moral or physical coöperation in his favour. He must necessarily feel that his plain unquestionable Interest is to put down the Pasha of Egypt, and to reestablish his own Authority in that Province and Syria. What he wants is the effectual aid of Great Britain for the accomplishment of this purpose, and there is little doubt, that, if His Majesty's Government could find in the present circumstances of the

¹ *Marginal note by Palmerston:* Is not the unwieldy extent of the Turkish Empire one great check to the improvement of its industry and resources and possibly one great cause of its external weakness? Is it quite clear that war on an extensive scale in an Empire which at all times & during what is — (?) peace is the Theatre of perpetual turbulence & petty disturbances is really so injurious to its commerce & improvements as this paragraph supports?

² *Marginal note by Palmerston:* This assumes more than is proved.

Turkish Empire adequate motives for acceding to this request, the presence of a British Squadron would suffice to ensure success.³

The principal difficulties, with which the Sultan has to contend in directing his operations against Mehemet Ali, arise out of the distant and insulated position of Egypt, the ease with which Syria can be defended against an Army invading it from the North, and the disadvantage of having a Fleet, which though superior in numerical Force to that of Egypt is by no means so well manned and manœuvred.

With the assistance of a British Squadron there is great reason to believe, that the Sultan would easily surmount these obstacles. Instead of attacking the Egyptian Forces in Syria, he might send an Expedition by Sea against Egypt itself. To the East of Damietta the Coast affords Facilities for landing Troops, and an invasion properly directed on that side would not only compel Ibrahim Pasha to retreat, but would also menace Cairo, and bring into the field all those, who, secretly attached to the Sultan's Cause, are nevertheless kept down at present by the want of support and the fear of Punishment.

Whatever just or insuperable objections may be raised on the score of expense, or on any other account, to the participation of Great Britain in this measure, the probable result of it would be beneficial in no small degree to her interests. The very attempt, indeed, would give her an important Influence in the Counsels of the Divan. That Influence would operate most powerfully in promoting the Progress of reform and civilization throughout Turkey; and the spirit of improvement, thus encouraged and directed, could hardly fail to revive the overlaid resources of a Country so rich in natural advantages.⁴ The Treaty of Alliance, which would naturally be formed to regulate the operations of the combined Forces, and to provide for the reception and refreshment of the British Squadron, might also contain Stipulations in favour of any specific concession desired by His Majesty's Government, as well as an engagement to indemnify our Merchants at Alexandria for any losses arising out of the participation of Great Britain in the Contest. The Sultan's Pardon and a suitable Provision for Mehemet Ali and his Son Ibrahim, in the event of their overthrow, might be secured by means of the same Instrument.

³ *Marginal note by Palmerston:* Or. Is even this quite certain?

⁴ *Marginal note by Palmerston:* We rescued Egypt once for Turkey. We acquired, or supposed that we acquired influence in this Divan. What was the beneficial result? Certainly no progress in civilization or Reform nor any such improvement of Turkish measures as is here contemplated.

It is obvious, that, as far as Great Britain is concerned, the only ground on which this plan could be recommended, is the necessity of interfering to rescue the Turkish Empire from a War, which threatens to lay it at the feet of a Power already too great for the general Interests and Liberties of Europe.⁵ It is impossible at the same time to contemplate such a necessity without an encreased Feeling of regret that a Contest fraught with such consequences should ever have commenced; and hence arises an anxious desire to discover some means of restoring matters, as nearly as may be practicable, to the state in which they stood before the Pasha's attempt upon Acre.

If it be true, as the Sultan alleges, that Mehemet Ali has embarked in an enterprize or mere Ambition; if he has taken advantage of his Sovereign's embarrassments with the sole view of establishing an independent Sovereignty for himself and his Family, there is evidently no middle course; he must either succeed altogether or fail altogether.⁶ The question in that case is, whether the object of enabling the Sultan to hasten the conclusion of the War by an attack upon Egypt, be sufficient to overbalance the objections which His Majesty's Government may entertain in general to extending their interference in foreign quarrels. Of their right to interfere upon an invitation from the Sultan there can be no doubt; and it is probable that the mode of interference suggested above would prove effectual.

But to judge impartially of the Viceroy's motives, we must call to mind the situation in which he was placed before his Expedition into Syria. The main object of the Sultan's internal Policy throughout his Reign has been the Suppression of all minor Authorities, which had acquired in any degree an abusive power of checking his own.⁷ Having destroyed the Janissaries, who formed the great obstacle to his designs, and having reconciled himself to the loss of Greece,—that perilous bone of contention between him and Christendom, his views were turned to the establishment of a more regular system of administration in the Provinces of his Empire, and to the cultivation of a better understanding with the Powers of Europe, and principally with Great Britain. Such being the case, it is far from improbable that Mehemet Ali may have looked with apprehension to the moment, when measures arising out of this policy would be applied

⁵ *Marginal note by Palmerston:* This is most just and true.

⁶ *Marginal note by Palmerston:* Do not see that this conclusion follows from the premises.

⁷ *Marginal note by Palmerston:* Is authority built on the forcible suppression of minor authorities — (?) and if not, in what would the Pasha's usurped authority differ from the Sultan's, if successful, but in degree? Both would be usurpation.

to Egypt, which he had advanced, during an administration of twenty years, from a state of confusion and comparative poverty, to a degree of improvement, in point of order and production, which filled his Coffers, and placed him at the head of a considerable military and naval force. He might have thought that the Sultan's designs, coinciding with his necessities, would shortly lead to the spoliation of these fruits of his eminent capacity for government, and therefore that it would be better to avail himself of the latter, while there was yet time, in order to increase his means of resisting the execution of the former at his expence. Upon this supposition prudence and not ambition would be the motive of his conduct; — security, rather than aggrandizement, his object. In a question of so much difficulty and complication, it may, therefore, be worth while to ascertain how far a reasonable security, consistent with what is due to the rights and character of the Sultan, might by possibility be obtained from him by means of British interference.

To go at once to the point, — it is clear that the Pasha cannot be left in possession of Syria, on any imaginable terms whatever, without a considerable loss of credit, if not of actual strength, to the Sultan's Government. His right to retain possession either of Syria or of Egypt without the Sultan's consent can only be the right of force.⁸ The obvious inference is that no arrangement intended to give security to the Pasha can be fairly proposed to the Porte, unless it be attended with the recall of the Egyptian forces from Syria. Nor is it likely that any proposal would prove effectual, which should not be accompanied with a distinct understanding as to the amount of revenue, and the contingent of troops and ships that the Pasha would be ready henceforward to hold at the Sultan's disposal, in consideration of his continuing to hold the Viceroyalty of Egypt for life, and cooperating with the Sultan for the advancement of those plans of reform, upon the execution of which the best and only hope of maintaining the independence of the Turkish Empire, and improving the condition of its inhabitants, may be truly said to depend. An arrangement comprizing these points, and concluded under the sanction, though not necessarily with the guarantee, of Great Britain, might be expected to allay the Pasha's apprehensions, supposing his present conduct to have originated rather in them than in any ambitious impulse. But in order to reconcile the Sultan's mind to a transaction which, at best, would be far from palatable to a Prince of his temper and policy, something more than the recollection of his disasters in the late campaign would be necessary. He would no doubt expect

⁸ *Marginal note by Palmerston:* What other has the Sultan?

of Great Britain to declare Herself openly in favour of his cause, and to follow up that declaration with measures tending to uphold his authority in the eyes of his subjects, and to facilitate his operations against the Egyptian forces. The most obvious measures of this description are a prohibition to His Majesty's subjects to convey provisions or warlike stores to Egypt and Syria,⁹ the establishment of Cruizers on the Coast to prevent the importation of those Articles, the recall of all British Subjects serving under the Pasha, an arrangement for introducing Engineers and Naval Officers into the Sultan's service, and a refusal to acknowledge the Egyptian Flag. To these might be added such diplomattick proceedings at The Courts of Persia and Greece, and at Bagdad, and in those parts of Syria which are not actually occupied by Ibrahim Pasha, as would counteract the intrigues of Mehemet Ali, and contribute to the promotion of the Sultan's interests in those Quarters.

Great Britain by adopting these measures, or measures like these, might perhaps be able to gain in a sufficient degree the confidence of the Sultan; but much would still remain to be done in order to bring the Viceroy of Egypt into an arrangement on the above mentioned terms. It would be necessary, in the first place, to extinguish his hope of our ever consenting to the accomplishment of his schemes of independence, in the second, to provide in some degree for Ibrahim Pasha's interests, — and, in the third, to soften his mortification at the loss of Syria by making some change in the Authorities of that Country more acceptable to him than the reinstatement of those whom he has forcibly removed. On the second and third of these points, it would of course be advisable to consult the views and feelings of the Viceroy himself, but as far as a conjecture may be hazarded, it is not impossible that an immediate transfer of the government of Candia to Ibrahim Pasha, or a promise of the reversion of that of Egypt to him during his life time on the same conditions under which it is proposed that Mehemet Ali should hold it in future, would be satisfactory on that point; and that as to Syria, the Sultan might be induced to consign the Pashalick of Acre to one of Mehemet Ali's grandsons, — provided no Egyptian Troops were allowed to remain there, and that the Fortress of Acre were garrisoned by a detachment of the Sultan's Guard, and commanded by a governor enjoying his confidence.

The effect of this plan, if it were carried into execution, would be

⁹ *Marginal note by Palmerston:* i.e. with a view to remote and precarious advantages to our commerce, to begin by cramping and prohibiting that which exists with Egypt and Syria.

to restore the matters in question as nearly as possible to their former state. It is grounded on the threefold persuasion that nothing but absolute necessity would induce the Sultan to consent to the union of the two Provinces of Egypt and Syria under Mehemet Ali; that his efforts to avert that necessity would exhaust his resources, and render the independence of his Empire still more precarious than now; and, finally, that His Majesty's Government might either find insuperable objections to cooperating with the Sultan by means of an auxiliary Squadron, or, at all events, that they would prefer withholding that kind of assistance until the experiment of milder measures had been made without success. The very apprehension of their recurring eventually to such an extremity would doubtless contribute to produce in the Viceroy's mind a disposition favourable to the acceptance of their proposals.

How far it may be practicable to render the proposed Alliance respecting Egypt, on either of the preceding suppositions, available to the acquisition of any exclusive advantage for Great Britain, is by no means so clear as the benefit which would in all probability accrue from it to the general interests of Europe and of Turkey itself. It is not to be doubted that our support, and more particularly our assistance under such circumstances, would secure the confidence and gratitude of the Sultan, and that he would be ready to make any reasonable sacrifice in return for such important aids. But the Porte is so bound by her Treaties with the principal European Powers, that no commercial privilege granted to one could long be withheld from the others, and it would be difficult to point out any special object of interest not coming under that head, unless it were the grant of certain facilities for navigating the River Euphrates by steam, with a view to the promotion of a more direct intercourse with India; the feasibility of which very important project, though probable in the highest degree, has not yet been submitted to actual experiment; or the privilege of obtaining ship-timber from the extensive forests of Turkey, which could only be of value to Great Britain in the event of Her being engaged in a naval war in some degree similar to the last. But it stands to reason that the same motives which induce the Sultan to court an Alliance with Great Britain would render the existence of that Alliance favourable to the promotion of our interests in Turkey. Nor can it be necessary to repeat that if it be a British and an European object to uphold the Turkish Empire as a barrier against encroachments from the North, and if the Sultan's independence be endangered by the chances of a contest indefinitely prolonged against Egypt, and the consequent interruption of measures essential

to its maintenance, there are sufficient motives for acceding, under proper restrictions, to the Sultan's overture without the additional inducement of a special or exclusive British interest.

Another part of the subject remains to be examined, and it is one which embraces such various and extensive considerations as scarcely to find place in a memoir grounded on the presumed facility of access to local information. The question of British interference in the Egyptian contest is, however, indissolubly connected with the policy of other Courts respecting Turkey. Nor is it possible to arrive at a satisfactory conclusion on the subject, without referring in some measure to the opposition or concurrence which Great Britain would have to expect from them in the event of her determining to support the Sultan's cause, or to offer her mediation between him and the Pasha of Egypt. But it is by no means necessary to go over the whole ground of inquiry on this occasion. What can be stated with some degree of confidence, or prospect of utility, it is not difficult to bring within a narrow compass.

There is no doubt that the Sultan would in any emergency look with preference to the Counsels or assistance of Great Britain. No Christian State ranks so high in his estimation either for power, or for good-faith. If England were to take up the affair of Egypt in concert with France He would not perhaps reject their joint interference accompanied with the support of his cause, but in all probability he would only consent to it from deference to His Majesty's Government. Many acts of France during the last forty years, concluding with the occupation of Algiers, have rendered the Porte extremely mistrustful of the Power. The concurrence of France in the supposed case could therefore be desirable to Great Britain, only as it might tend to allay jealousy, or enable her to operate more effectually on the Pasha of Egypt. The motives which at present prevail with the French Ministers to cultivate the good-will and confidence of England, might possibly suffice to reconcile them to her single interference in the Affairs of Turkey; but the counteraction, however disguised, of a Power like France could hardly fail to increase the difficulties already existing, and it is well known that the French Cabinet has long regarded the Levant, and Syria and Egypt in particular, with more than common interest.¹⁰

Of the two remaining Powers, whose disposition with respect to

¹⁰ *Marginal note by Palmerston:* Surely it would be very strange if it did — should we be easily reconciled to the *single* interference of France? Yet France is not by position and actual connection more directly interested in Turkish affairs than ourselves?

Turkey is of any immediate consequence, Austria would no doubt behold with satisfaction the influence and energy of Great Britain employed in support of the Sultan's authority and the preservation of His empire from dismemberment. It is equally clear that a similar interference for such purposes could never be agreeable to Russia, although the feelings, which it would be likely to excite in that quarter, might soften in proportion as British influence was pointed to the overthrow of rebellion; and the Court of St. Petersburg, though no less adverse to our interference than to the Sultan's application for it, could hardly, with due regard to its own principles and professions of peace, step forward to *oppose* its exercise.¹¹

To return to the main question, there is no denying that whether it be contemplated with reference to a single or to a joint interference, the difficulties are great, the hazards considerable. In one respect, however, the prospect is clear. Let Mehemet Ali succeed in constituting an independent State, and a great and irretrievable step is made towards the dismemberment of the Turkish Empire. That Empire may fall to pieces at all events; and he must be a bold man who would undertake to answer for its being saved by any effort of human policy. But His Majesty's Government may rest assured that to leave it to itself is to leave it to its Enemies.

¹¹ *Marginal note by Palmerston:* Perhaps not, but would she or could *she* be entirely neutral and passive on such an occasion — America is not glanced (?) at but she has commerce in those parts and by interfering we sanction her right of interfering too.